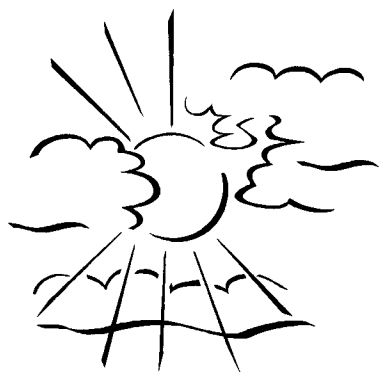


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Poverty Rate	2-15
*State Budget	16-17
Health Care	18-21
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	22-27
Foster Care	28-29
Juvenile Justice	30-32
Housing	33-34
Advocacy	35-36

U.S. Poverty Rate Was Up Last Year

By DAVID LEONHARDT

Published: August 31, 2005

The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30 - Even as the economy grew, incomes stagnated last year and the poverty rate rose, the Census Bureau reported Tuesday. It was the first time on record that household incomes failed to increase for five straight years.

The portion of Americans without health insurance remained roughly steady at 16 percent, the bureau said. A smaller percentage of people were covered by their employers, but two big government programs, Medicaid and military insurance, grew.

The census's annual report card on the nation's economic well-being showed that a four-year-old expansion had still not done much to benefit many households. Median pretax income, \$44,389, was at its lowest point since 1997, after inflation.

Though the reasons are not wholly clear, economists say technology and global trade appear to be holding down pay for many workers. The rising cost of health care benefits has also eaten into pay increases.

After the report's release, Bush administration officials said that the job market had continued to improve since the end of 2004 and that they hoped incomes were now rising and poverty was falling. The poverty rate "is the last, lonely trailing indicator of the business cycle," said Elizabeth Anderson, chief of staff in the economics and statistics administration of the Commerce Department.

The census numbers also do not reflect the tax cuts passed in President Bush's first term, which have lifted the take-home pay of most families.

But the biggest tax cuts went to high-income families already getting raises, Democrats said Tuesday. The report, they added, showed that the cuts had failed to stimulate the economy as the White House had promised.

"The growth in the economy is not going to families," said Senator Jack Reed, Democrat of Rhode Island. "It's in stark contrast to what happened during the Clinton administration."

The main theme of the census report seemed to be the lingering weakness in compensation and benefits, even as the ranks of the unemployed have dwindled. Fewer people are getting health insurance from their employers or from policies of family members, while raises have generally trailed inflation.

Last year, households kept income from falling by working more hours than they did in 2003, the data showed. The median pay of full-time male workers declined more than 2 percent in 2004, to \$40,800; for women, the median dropped 1 percent, to \$31,200. When some people switch to full-time work from part-time, they can keep household incomes from dropping even when the pay of individual workers is declining.

"It looks like the gains from the recovery haven't really filtered down," said Phillip L. Swagel, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative research group in Washington. "The gains have gone to owners of capital and not to workers."

There has always been a lag between the end of a recession and the resumption of raises, Mr. Swagel added, but the length of this lag has been confounding.

In addition, the poverty rate rose last year for working-age people, those ages 18 to 64. The portion of people age 65 and older in poverty fell, while child poverty was essentially flat.

Over all, the poverty rate increased to 12.7 percent, from 12.5 percent in 2003. Poverty levels have changed only modestly in the last three decades, rising in the 1980's and falling in the 1990's, after having dropped sharply in the 1960's. They reached a low of 11.1 percent in 1973, from more than 22 percent in 1960.

In the same three decades that poverty has remained fairly steady, median incomes have grown significantly, lifting living standards for most families. After adjusting for inflation, the income of the median household, the one making more than half of all others and less than half of the rest, earns almost one-third more now than it did in the late 1960's.

But income inequality has also risen in that time and was near all-time highs last year, the bureau reported. The census numbers do not include gains from stock holdings, which would further increase inequality.

In New York, the poverty rate rose last year to 20.3 percent, from 19 percent, making it the only city of more than one million people with a significant change. The reason for the increase was not obvious.

Among populous counties, the Bronx had the fourth-highest poverty rate in the nation, trailing three counties on the Texas-Mexico border.

Many economists say the government's statistics undercount poverty in New York and other major cities because the numbers are not adjusted for cost of living. A family of two parents and two children is considered poor if it makes less than \$19,157 a year, regardless of whether it lives in a city where \$500,000 buys a small apartment or a mansion.

Households in New Hampshire made more last year (\$57,400 at the median) than in any other state, while those in West Virginia made the least (\$32,600). Fairfax County in Virginia (\$88,100) and Somerset County in New Jersey (\$84,900) were the counties with the highest earnings, the census said.

The decline in employer-provided health benefits came after four years of rapidly rising health costs. Some of the increases stemmed from inefficiencies in the health care system; others were a result of new treatments that improved health and prolonged life but were often expensive.

Either way, the bill for health care has risen, and more companies are deciding not to pay it for some workers. The percentage of people getting health insurance from an employer fell to 59.8 percent last year, from 63.6 percent in 2000. The percentage receiving it from the government rose to 27.2 percent, from 24.7 percent.

The trend is likely to continue unless the job market becomes as tight as it was in the late 1990's and companies decide they must offer health insurance to retain workers, said Paul Fronstin, director of the health research program at the Employee Benefit Research Group, a nonpartisan organization in Washington.

The numbers released Tuesday showed a slight decline in median income, but the bureau called the drop, \$93, statistically insignificant. Incomes were also roughly flat among whites, blacks, Hispanics and Asian-Americans.

The Midwest, which has been hurt by the weak manufacturing sector, was the only region where the median income fell and poverty rose. Elsewhere, they were unchanged.

Since 1967, incomes have failed to rise for four straight years on two other occasions: starting in the late 1970's and in the early 1990's. The Census Bureau does not report household income for years before 1967, but other data show that incomes were generally rising in the 40's, 50's and 60's.

Poverty Rate Rises to 12.7 Percent

By JENNIFER C. KERR/The Associated Press

Wednesday, August 31, 2005; 12:23 AM

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON -- Even with a robust economy that was adding jobs last year, the number of Americans who fell into poverty rose to 37 million _ up 1.1 million from 2003 _ according to Census Bureau figures released Tuesday.

It marks the fourth straight increase in the government's annual poverty measure.

The Census Bureau also said household income remained flat, and that the number of people without health insurance edged up by about 800,000 to 45.8 million people.

"I was surprised," said Sheldon Danziger, co-director of the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan. "I thought things would have turned around by now."

While disappointed, the Bush administration _ which has not seen a decline in poverty numbers since the president took office _ said it was not surprised by the new statistics.

Commerce Department spokeswoman E.R. Anderson said they mirror a trend in the '80s and '90s in which unemployment peaks were followed by peaks in poverty and then by a decline in the poverty numbers the next year.

"We hope this is it, that this is the last gasp of indicators for the recession," she said.

Democrats seized on the numbers as proof the nation is headed in the wrong direction.

"America should be showing true leadership on the great moral issues of our time _ like poverty _ instead of allowing these situations to get worse," said John Edwards, the former North Carolina senator and Democratic vice presidential candidate. He has started a poverty center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Overall, the nation's poverty rate rose to 12.7 percent of the population last year. Of the 37 million living below the poverty level, close to a third were children.

The last decline in overall poverty was in 2000, during the Clinton administration, when 31.1 million people lived under the threshold. Since then, the number of people in poverty has increased steadily from 32.9 million in 2001, when the economy slipped into recession, to 35.9 million in 2003.

The poverty threshold differs by the size and makeup of a household. For instance, a family of four was considered living in poverty last year if annual income was \$19,307 or less. For a family of two, it was \$12,334.

The increase in poverty came despite strong economic growth, which helped create 2.2 million jobs last year _ the best showing for the labor market since 1999. By contrast, there was only a tiny increase of 94,000 jobs in 2003 and job losses in both 2002 and 2001.

Asians were the only ethnic group to show a decline in poverty _ from 11.8 percent in 2003 to 9.8 percent last year. The poverty rate for whites rose from 8.2 percent in 2003 to 8.6 percent last year. There was no noticeable change for blacks and Hispanics.

The median household income, meanwhile, stood at \$44,389, unchanged from 2003. Among racial and ethnic groups, blacks had the lowest median income and Asians the highest. Median income refers to the point at which half of households earn more and half earn less.

Regionally, income declined only in the Midwest, down 2.8 percent to \$44,657. The South was the poorest region and the Northeast and the West had the highest median incomes.

The number of people without health insurance coverage grew from 45 million to 45.8 million last year, but the number of people with health insurance grew by 2 million.

Charles Nelson, an assistant division chief at the Census Bureau, said the percentage of uninsured remained steady because of an "increase in government coverage, notably Medicaid and the state children's health insurance program that offset a decline in employment-based coverage."

The estimates on poverty, uninsured and income are based on supplements to the bureau's Current Population Survey, and are conducted over three months, beginning in February, at about 100,000 households nationwide.

Detroit tops nation in poverty census

A third of residents below federal level

August 31, 2005

**BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI, KATHLEEN GRAY and CECIL ANGEL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS**

Detroit is the nation's poorest big city, with about one in three residents living below the federal poverty level -- \$19,157 in household income for a family of four.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported Tuesday that 33.6% of Detroiters had income below the poverty level in 2004, compared with about 23% in 2002. In the two-year span, "you're talking somewhere easily between 75,000 to 80,000 more people living in poverty" in Detroit, said Kurt Metzger, research director of Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies.

And nearly half of Detroit children 17 and younger lived in impoverished homes in 2004.

The two pieces of bad news come as Detroit struggles with a high unemployment rate, a municipal budget teetering on bankruptcy and its core auto industry struggling.

The numbers also signaled, said researchers, that middle-class Detroiters are leaving the city.

El Paso, Texas, followed Detroit in 2004 with a 28.8% poverty rate. In 2003, Cleveland topped the list.

A family of four is considered living below the poverty level if their income is \$19,157 or less. A single person age 65 or older is considered impoverished with an income of \$9,060 or less.

Some 47.8% of Detroit children lived below the poverty level in 2004, ranking Detroit second in that category only behind Atlanta.

Detroit's unemployment rate has hovered around 15% for much of the year.

"The question is how many people have given up," said Metzger. "We have almost historically high unemployment rates. We're at unemployment rates we were at in the late 1980s and early 1990s."

The median income of a Detroit household was \$27,871 in 2004, meaning half of households earned more and half less. That's far below the median income for the average Michigan family, which was \$44,280 in 2003-04, down about 3% from \$45,550 in 2002-03.

The census numbers suggested that Detroiters with means are leaving the city.

"You're leaving people in poverty in the city, but you're moving people with higher income outside," said Larry Ledebur, an economic development professor at Cleveland State University and former director of WSU's Center for Urban Studies.

Michigan's poverty rate also increased, rising from 11.5% of the population in 2002-03 to 12.3% in 2003-04.

"We don't need a report out of Washington to tell us that people in Michigan are hurting," said Liz Boyd, spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm. Granholm is pressing for an increase in the state's hourly minimum wage to \$7.15 from the federal standard of \$5.15.

A spokesman for Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick said the city is trying to lure diverse industries to the city to help bring new jobs for its citizens.

"By partnering with organizations like the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, we're creating new economies and innovative educational opportunities," said Kilpatrick spokesman Howard Hughey.

Sheldon Danziger, the codirector of the National Poverty Center, said Michigan was particularly hard hit because of the continued decline in manufacturing jobs. The median household income

adjusted for inflation in Wayne County, for example, has declined by 10% since 2000 while the national decline was only 3%.

"This region has been hit pretty hard," said Danziger. "We were doing much better in the 1990s than the national average. But since 2000, we've been doing worse."

For organizations that provide services for poor residents, the census news came as no surprise.

"I think we already knew that," said Mary Ellen Howard, director of the St. Frances Cabrini Clinic in Detroit, which provides free medical and mental health services to about 150 people a week. "We get a lot more people in here than we can handle, so we don't even keep track of the number of people that we have to refer elsewhere."

She added: "We only have three fish and five loaves and there are 5,000 people on the hillside waiting to be fed."

At the Jeffries East, a public housing project on Detroit's west side, Constance Weatherspoon spoke Tuesday about being poor.

"This is one of the worst times in my life to live in a place like this," said Weatherspoon, 32, who has lived in the project for four years.

Weatherspoon is legally blind. Per month, she receives \$579 in Supplemental Security Income for herself and \$425 from the state's Department of Human Services for her daughter, 11, and sons, 9 and 7. She also receives \$230 in food stamps a month.

"I'm trying to live for them," she said.

Contact **PATRICIA MONTEMURRI** at 313-223-4538

Living poor

A family of four is considered living below the poverty level if their income is \$19,157 or less.		
Area	Percent of population living below poverty level	Median household income
Michigan	12.3%	\$44,905
Detroit	33.6%	\$27,871
Wayne County	20.1%	\$40,322
Oakland County	5.3%	\$63,035
Macomb County	7.2%	\$51,215
Macomb County numbers come from a 2002 U.S. census survey. Other numbers come from a 2004 survey released Tuesday, in which Macomb County was not included.		
Source: U.S. Census		

State income down, poverty up Poverty grows among Washtenaw County seniors; Detroit poorest

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

BY SARAH KELLOGG

Ann Arbor News Washington Bureau

U.S. Census Bureau data released Tuesday show that the number of Michigan residents living in poverty went up between 2003 and 2004, while the state's median household income went down. The city of Detroit was left with the dubious distinction of being the poorest city in the nation. The news for Washtenaw County was mixed, but generally good.

While the state's overall poverty rate was increasing, Washtenaw County's went down. But the county's rate was still slightly higher than the rest of the state as a whole.

The most troubling part of the report for the county was a big jump in the percentage of older people living in poverty. According to the census bureau's American Community Survey, the percentage of people 65 and older living in poverty in Washtenaw County rose from 5.9 percent to 10.4 percent between 2002 and 2004 (2003 numbers were not available for individual counties).

Still, the numbers appeared to show that Washtenaw County's economic health was improving, even as the state's was faltering.

According to the report, the percentage of people living in poverty in Washtenaw County dropped from 13.2 percent in 2002 to 12.6 percent in 2004.

And Washtenaw County's median household income - already well above the state average - rose from \$48,145 in 2002 to \$51,236 in 2004. The county's median family income rose from \$66,527 to \$67,167 during the same time period.

"Washtenaw County has had a very good economy," said Rebecca Blank, a co-director of the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

"We look quite different than the rest of the state. I'm not surprised at all to see poverty going down in the county."

Michigan's poverty rate of 12.3 percent in 2004 was lower than the national average of 12.7 percent, but it was up from the 11.5 percent rate in 2003. About 1.2 million people in Michigan were living in poverty last year.

Between 2003 and 2004, Michigan's median household income dipped from \$45,550 to \$44,280. The U.S. median household income remained stagnant at \$44,436 in 2004.

Michigan also has the poorest city in the nation, the Census Bureau reported. Detroit was elevated to the No. 1 spot with a 33.6 percent poverty rate in 2004. El Paso, Texas, and Miami were Nos. 2 and 3.

"The report confirms what we've known all along," said Sharon Parks, a spokeswoman for the Michigan League for Human Services, a policy and research group in Lansing. "This is pretty much a jobless recovery, and even those with jobs aren't seeing major improvements in their incomes."

But Michigan isn't alone in suffering through the economic doldrums.

Nationwide, nearly 37 million Americans lived below the official poverty line in 2004, a rise of 1.1 million people from 2003, when the poverty rate was 12.5 percent. The poverty rate was last this high in 1998.

The Census Bureau also reported that 45.8 million Americans, or 15.7 percent, lacked health insurance in 2004, essentially the same amount as the 15.6 percent in 2003.

With family incomes stagnating in the United States last year and more Americans slipping into poverty. The report raised questions about which Americans are enjoying the fruits of an economic expansion that began in 2001.

It was the fourth consecutive year that the report found an increase in the U.S. poverty rate. Twenty-five states saw their median household incomes drop in 2004 and 33 states saw their poverty rates rise.

"If (2004) were a recession year, these would actually be quite reasonable results," said Robert Greenstein, a spokesman for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal Washington-based policy group. "For the third year of an economic recovery, they have to be branded as quite disappointing."

State officials were disappointed as well, noting that they have tried to diversify Michigan's economy to trim its reliance on automobile manufacturing and expand its economic base.

"We don't need a report out of Washington to tell us that people are hurting in Michigan," said Liz Boyd, press secretary to Gov. Jennifer Granholm. "Michigan's reliance on old industries has to change, and change is hard."

Michigan's child poverty rate rose between 2003 and 2004, jumping from 15 percent to nearly 18 percent, the report shows. Detroit had about 48 percent of children in poverty, second only to Atlanta. The 2004 poverty threshold was \$19,311 for a family of four.

The differences between Michigan's haves and have-nots was most clearly illustrated in the economic results from Oakland and Wayne counties, which are neighbors in Southeast Michigan.

Oakland was Michigan's most affluent county, according to the data, with a median household income of \$63,035 in 2004, while Wayne County's median household income was \$40,322.

Between 2003 and 2004, Oakland County saw a dramatic decline in its poverty rate from 7.7 percent to 5.3 percent. Wayne County had the highest county poverty rate in the report at 20.1 percent, up from 17.2 percent in 2003.

There was one piece of good news in the report for Michigan. The number of Michigan residents without health insurance declined slightly between 2003 and 2004, inching down from 11.3 percent to 11.2 percent. About 1 million people in Michigan are without health insurance.

"The number of people who do have health insurance in Michigan is still above average," said Laurence Rosen, an analyst with Public Policy Associates Inc., a Lansing-based policy group. "A lot of that has to do with the fairly heavy union presence here in the state."

The report also shows a disparity in earnings between Michigan's male and female workers. Men's median earnings in 2004 were \$46,475 compared to women's \$31,808. Women earned 68.4 percent of what men earned. The state ranks 48th among the states and the District of Columbia in the disparity in male-female earnings. Only Utah, Montana and Louisiana had women earning a smaller percentage than Michigan.

The Los Angeles Time contributed to this story.

More poor added to rolls

Poverty numbers up by 20 percent

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

By Ron Fonger rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

GENESEE COUNTY - The number of county residents living in poverty rose sharply -up 20 percent from 2003 to 2004, according to a new report from the Census Bureau.

But the federal agency warned Tuesday that the report, which listed Detroit as the poorest city in the nation with a 33.6 percent poverty rate in 2004, was based on a relatively low number of returned questionnaires.

And some agencies that work with the poor here said the premise of the survey seemed true but the rate of increase seemed overstated.

The Census Bureau report said the increase in poverty has been even higher among women in the county -up more than 25 percent in the same period.

"We used to have a time when summertime was a little slower. Now we are busy the whole year," said Deborah McCormack, president and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee counties.

Catholic Charities runs the North End Soup Kitchen and other programs that help the poor.

The data released Tuesday shows 17 percent of the people in the county (74,849 people) lived in poverty last year, up from 14.2 percent (62,094 people) in 2003.

The average poverty threshold for a family of four in 2004 was an income of \$19,307; for a family of three, \$15,067; for a family of two, \$12,334; and for unrelated individuals, \$9,645, according to the Census Bureau.

Karen Carter, 39, of Montrose said she believes the numbers, based on her own experience looking for work and trying to get assistance with her utility bills.

Carter, who works two jobs -as an insurance biller and a food clerk -eventually was forced to move from her house and is staying with a friend.

She said charity assistance is limited because so many people need help here.

"It's a never-ending circle ... and I'm getting nowhere," said Carter, a mother of three. "The economy is very slow. It's pretty ugly."

Steve Walker, executive director of the county Community Action Resource Department, said the sharp, quick increase in the number of people in poverty is surprising to him, but the trend of more poverty is not.

Unemployment locally remains among the highest in the state and entry-level jobs pay less than starting jobs in similar-sized counties, Walker said.

"It's an employer's market. There's just been an awful lot of drying up of jobs where you have a decent wage," Walker said.

Only recently, Walker's department warned the county Board of Commissioners that money for utility bill assistance was quickly running out because too many people are seeking help.

Last year, the department helped commission a report on poverty in the county, calling it a growing social crisis.

In 1960, one in 10 Flint residents lived in poverty, according to that report. By 2000, the ratio had increased to one in four.

Clive Richmond, a statistician with the Census Bureau, said the new report is based on random surveys - about 800 of which were returned in 2003 in the county.

The bureau has a 90 percent confidence that the county results from 2004 fall between about 63,000 and 86,000 people living in poverty here.

Poverty Rates Support Increased Minimum Wage

A new report from the U.S. Census Bureau, out today, has Michigan Democrats pointing out that there is a real need to raise the state's minimum wage. The report showed that in 2004, the percent of Michigan residents the agency considers living in poverty climbed by 12.3 percent.

"These poverty numbers highlight the need to act on Democratic legislation ... to increase Michigan's minimum wage. The number of people living below the poverty line is growing because minimum wage is at one of its lowest levels in history," said Michigan Democratic Party Chair Mark **BREWER**. "Raising the minimum wage would directly benefit at least 464,000 workers across the state and given that 40 percent of minimum wage workers are the sole breadwinners for their family, a minimum wage increase will have a direct impact on reducing poverty."

The U.S. Census Bureau's definition of poverty differs according to the makeup of a household. A family of four with two children was considered to be living in poverty if their income was \$19,157 a year or less. For a family of two with no children, it was \$12,649 and for someone 65 and older living alone, it was \$9,060.

"Raising the minimum wage would not only help the poorest amongst the state, it would also help Michigan recover from its economic problems," Brewer added. "States with a higher minimum wage are the driving force behind the national recovery, growing 1.5 percent more quickly than other states. If we are going to stem this growth in poverty and begin to solve Michigan's economic problems, we must give workers a more livable wage."

Economist Patrick **ANDERSON**, founder of the Anderson Economic Group has a different perspective.

"I think Mr. Brewer has cause and effect reversed," said Anderson. "States that are doing well tend to increase their wages. And the minimum wage, set by law, tends to lag behind the wages set in the private economy."

He argues that the "criminalizing" of hiring entry wage workers at an appropriate wage is "almost universally accepted" by economists as resulting in more unemployment and rising crime.

"For a state that desperately needs jobs, telling employers they need to pay more is hardly an intelligent thing to do," Anderson added.

Michigan Report

August 30, 2005

MICHIGAN INCOMES DROP IN 2004

Though the poverty rate in Michigan did not change, average residents saw their household incomes fall in 2004 – and fall below national earnings, according to a report released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Michigan was one of eight states that saw incomes fall, with the median income, averaged for 2003-04, down 2.8 percent from 2002-03 to \$44,280, while the nation as a whole saw no statistical change in incomes, at \$44,389.

Of the states that lost household income, Michigan fared the best. Georgia lost the most, with median incomes falling 4.7 percent. Only five states saw incomes climb, with Idaho topping that list at a 5.8 percent growth.

Michigan fared better than the nation on poverty, with no statistical change in its poverty rate. While poverty actually increased to 12.3 percent in 2003-04 from 11.5 percent in 2002-03, the report said that change was not statistically significant. Nationally, the poverty rate increased to 12.7 percent from 12.5 percent in 2002-03, but the report said that was a significant change.

Though incomes were dropping and, at least numerically, poverty was increasing, health insurance coverage remained steady, the report said. 11.2 percent of Michigan residents had no health insurance coverage in 2003-04, down from 11.3 percent in 2002-03, and again statistically insignificant. Nationally, 15.7 percent were without coverage, up from 15.4 percent, but also insignificant.

“We don’t need a report out of Washington to tell us people are hurting in Michigan,” said Liz Boyd, press secretary for Governor Jennifer Granholm. “If we have people without a good job, it’s going to affect the kinds of reports that we see out today.”

Ms. Boyd said the governor was working to reverse the trends. “The governor is working to diversify the state’s economy and create jobs,” she said.

Maureen Sorbet with the Department of Human Services said the figures track with the caseload data her department has compiled. “We have had some pretty significant increases,” she said. “Much of it can be attributed to the continued economic downturn in the state. The trend seems to be continuing.”

Ms. Sorbet said the administration is working on a variety of fronts to try to correct the situation. “The governor’s working on plans to bring more employment into the state,” she said. “We’re working with our training programs to try to prepare our clients for work.”

Jane Zehnder-Merrell with the Michigan League for Human Services said the report should be a warning to legislators to avoid cuts in Medicaid and other safety net programs. "Clearly Michigan is in the economic doldrums, and yet our policy makers at both the national and state level are looking to cut programs to get through these tough economic times," she said.

She argued that spending, not business tax cuts, is needed to keep families in the state afloat. "We're trying to address this issue in terms of tax breaks for business. All the data and the experts say that doesn't work," she said. "The kinds of things we're doing are not going to take us there unless we invest in people."

She said the report on local data showed that cuts to support programs would particularly hurt Detroit and Wayne County, which were above the national average and above many other urban areas in terms of poverty. Detroit is poorest city in terms of poverty and the fourth poorest city in terms of median income.

At 33.6 percent, Detroit had more impoverished residents than any other city of at least 250,000 people, with El Paso, Texas, the nearest at 28.8 percent. The least poverty was in Anchorage, Alaska, at 7.4 percent. Detroit was fourth in median annual income at income of \$27,871. Miami, Florida, had the lowest income at \$24,031 a year and San Jose, California, is the wealthiest at \$71,765.

Wayne County's poverty rate was 20.1 percent in 2004, which increased from the 17.2 percent in 2003 and had steadily since 2000.

Michigan Democratic Party Chair Mark Brewer said the report shows the need for a minimum wage increase. "The number of people living below the poverty line is growing because minimum wage is at one of its lowest levels in history," Mr. Brewer said. "Raising the minimum wage would directly benefit at least 464,000 workers across the state and given that forty percent of minimum wage workers are the sole bread winners for their family, a minimum wage increase will have a direct impact on reducing poverty."

Nate Bailey with the Michigan Republican Party said the minimum wage increase would only exacerbate the problem. "We've seen countless studies say only thing this minimum wage hike will do is cost Michigan jobs," he said. "It would cost one in five already existing minimum wage jobs."

Pat Anderson with the Anderson Economic Group agreed on the dire picture the report paints. "It confirms that the economic distress that we've been seeing in the unemployment numbers extends to the earnings," he said. "It wasn't like these folks got nipped by inflation. They had their actual earnings decline."

The numbers have actually gotten worse in 2005, Mr. Anderson said.

But he disagreed that the statistics are any indication of a need for more state spending. "One clear problem is that our business taxes are higher than the nation as a whole, yet our workers are earning less," he said. "They say that we cannot afford a government that's as big or as expensive as the one we have today."

He said in particular the state should be looking at an earned income tax credit to allow those who are working to keep more of what they make. He said the credit was an incentive to work that would not cost employers.

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

State hits crunch time on budget

Granholt, legislators face tough calls on school funding and Medicaid cuts as deadline looms.

By Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- With the state's new budget year only a month away, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and legislative leaders continue to haggle over which Medicaid programs to cut, which prisons to close and how much to spend on higher education.

Meanwhile, those who depend on state support for their lifeblood -- such as local school districts and state colleges -- are left wondering whether they will have enough money to pay for programs and services that have already started.

"School board members and administrators are frustrated because they're forced into speculation," said Justin King, executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards. "The state has them sitting around on pins and needles. That has to take some of the attention away from teaching and learning."

In a normal year, the state budget is all but finished by July. The administration and Republican lawmakers, at loggerheads over several spending items, failed to reach agreement and then vowed to resolve their differences during summer. They met occasionally in July and August but no deal was struck. Now that summer vacation is over, they have a load of work bearing down on them.

Lawmakers have only a few weeks to pass a budget and they're also working on two other weighty issues: Reforming the state's business tax system and figuring out how to pay for a jobs development program in the state with the nation's highest unemployment rate.

None of those matters was hammered out during the break, although an agreement apparently is close on the economic development plan that would involve using \$1 billion in tobacco lawsuit settlement money to provide seed money for high-tech businesses.

"We have some sticking points to work out, but I think we can get it done," said Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak.

"We've reached the stage where the speaker, the Senate majority leader and the governor have to sit down and hash out large items of difference. Starting last week, I think we started to get serious about it."

The four legislative leaders met twice with Granholm on budget issues Tuesday.

Those involved in the budget talks offered several reasons why compromise has been tough to come by this year:

- After several years of budget cuts, tax and fee increases and accounting shifts, there are fewer and tougher options left.

Republicans insisted early on that taxes not be raised, making it more difficult to balance the books.

- The House used a new approach to budget building that slowed the process early. Also, several House members involved in negotiating the budget are new, thanks to term limits.

- New House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, has been more of an activist on behalf of his conservative caucus than was his more moderate and conciliatory predecessor. This has led to a number of clashes, especially over tax issues, with Granholm and even with Senate leadership on occasion.

- The budget, business tax reform and job development plans are intertwined, making negotiations more complicated.

But neither Granholm nor Senate leaders have signed on to it as talks continue.

Will today's House action mean a step backward in sensitive negotiations?

"That depends," said Treasurer Jay Rising, on whether the House ultimately sees its proposal as a bargaining position or a take-it-or-leave-it proposition.

You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.

More Americans left uninsured for health

August 31, 2005

BY KIM NORRIS
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Nearly 1 million people joined the ranks of the uninsured in 2004 and more would have if not for government health insurance programs picking up where the nation's employers left off.

The percentage of people without health insurance in 2004 remained unchanged at 15.7%, even as the actual number of uninsured people rose by 800,000, to 45.8 million people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which released its annual survey on health insurance coverage Tuesday as part of a larger report that includes statistics on incomes and poverty.

In Michigan, the number of uninsured rose by 76,000 to 1.156 million people, or 11.6% of the population. It is not a coincidence that Michigan's economy has been lagging and its unemployment rate among the nation's highest. Often people who lose their jobs lose their health coverage.

The Koch family became statistics this year when they dropped coverage for themselves and their four children. Jeff Koch's machinery warehouse business -- dependant on Michigan's struggling auto industry -- has been particularly hard hit this year, straining the family's finances.

When the cost of health insurance, already \$7,400 a year, was about to increase another \$1,200, the Waterford couple decided to go without coverage for the first time.

"Money's just getting tight and something had to go," Jeff Koch said.

"And insurance is one of the easiest things when you compare it to electricity and phone and mortgage."

While he is comfortable that he could handle doctor bills for minor ailments and the occasional broken bone, he worries that a major event that puts him or a family member in the hospital could push them into bankruptcy.

"It makes me nervous every day," he said. "The stuff I do is very dangerous. I'm moving 50,000-pound machines ... It would only take one slip or one chain link to break ... "

Kim Koch, who shops for the family's insurance policies, says she has considered getting a job just for the health benefits. But few jobs

provide coverage to part-time workers and she doesn't want to work full time.

The percentage of people covered by employer-based insurance dropped from 60.4% in 2003 to 59.8% in 2004. The trend was reflected in Michigan, where it fell from 69%, or 6.84 million people, to 67.5%, or 6.73 million.

The decline in employer coverage was offset by an increase in people covered by government programs, specifically Medicaid, indicating that the health insurance program funded by state and federal governments is picking up the slack, said Kathleen Stoll, health policy director for Families USA, a nonprofit advocacy group.

"We would have seen a lot more uninsured if we didn't have that Medicaid safety net out there," she said.

But Congress' intention to eliminate \$10 billion from the Medicaid budget is likely to exacerbate an already grim budget in most states.

The federal government matches state spending on Medicaid at varying amounts. "We have a growing crisis," Stoll said. "We aren't looking at solutions to the crisis. We're looking at cutting back the very program that has cushioned the impact."

The situation is expected to get worse as employers ask workers to assume more costs or drop worker coverage.

Contact KIM NORRIS at 248-351-5186 or norris@freepress.com.

8/30/05

State fraud unit targets Medicaid theft

Several companies recently charged with filing false claims

From The Associated Press

LANSING — A state team made up of 36 lawyers, investigators and experts is working to fight fraud that drains millions of dollars each year from the state's Medicaid program.

The health care fraud unit recovers only a fraction of what's stolen each year through phony claims to Medicaid, a joint state-federal program that covers health care costs for the poor, a Detroit newspaper reported.

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox is intensifying efforts to weed out fraud. He is looking to join national lawsuits against sham operations and enlist the public in tracking down Medic-

aid crooks.

Last year, the fraud unit recovered \$14 million. In recent months, several companies in Michigan have been charged with stealing through false claims for services, prescription drugs and dental care.

"People see that there's a lot of money in health care, and a whole lot of people want to prey on that system," Cox said. "We have to go after the bigger cases, to be the big stick that whacks people and deters others."

Cox is pushing legislation being considered by the state House that would award people who successfully sue thieving health care providers for Medicaid fraud at least 15 percent of the settlement, plus attorney fees.

It is unclear exactly how much money is lost to fraud. Na-

tional statistics cited by Cox estimate that every state loses 3 percent to 10 percent of its Medicaid budget to fraud — or about \$225 million to \$750 million in Michigan.

But Michigan Medicaid Director Paul Reinhart said the actual effect on Michigan's budget is less.

Reinhart said that about \$1.6 billion of the state's Medicaid budget is susceptible to fraud. The remaining \$5.9 billion is dished out to managed care organizations, nursing homes and other operations that charge the state a fixed rate for services.

Reinhart said paying companies to administer Medicaid care has helped the state.

"We have addressed this program by organizing it in a way to reduce this potential for fraud," he said.

Medicaid's ills skin-deep

More serious problem is lack of alternatives for long-term care

OTHER VOICES

BY JACOB S. HACKER
AND HAROLD POLLACK

Defenders of Medicaid, the health program for low-income people, are used to trench warfare. When government budgets get squeezed, Medicaid is invariably blamed. The adjectives are familiar: "uncontrollable," "inefficient," "exorbitant."

President Bush and several governors are calling for major Medicaid cuts this year to restrain soaring costs. But there's a difference this time. Traditional Medicaid-bashers targeted routine care for poor people. Current bashers are taking aim at long-term care for the middle class. As one critic put it, Medicaid has become "welfare-financed nursing homes" for rich seniors who see it as an "inheritance protection plan."

The criticism is... refreshingly. For years, poor single moms and their kids bore most of the ire, even as more and more Medicaid dollars went to nursing-home residents and the disabled. Medicaid has evolved from a relatively small welfare program tacked onto Medicare in 1965 into a \$340 billion behemoth serving a diverse and growing share of the population. Over the last two decades, it has become a lifeline for millions of people who require nursing home care.

Yet, once you ask why Medicaid plays this pivotal role, it is obvious that simply cutting the program won't work. The real problem isn't well-off senior citizens using the system. Rather, it is that few Americans have reliable and effective private alternatives that can protect them if they require long-term care. Cutting Medicaid won't change this reality. It would also forfeit an opportunity to reconsider the division of labor between states

and the federal government in managing a huge social problem.

Hard as it is for free-market enthusiasts to admit, long-term care insurance will never work for millions of Americans. Insurers may offer more policies, but without major changes in the market, these will continue to be complex, costly and often inadequate. Consumers will likely shun such policies even if government subsidizes them. Consumer Reports reviewed 47 policies offered by seven firms. After finding only three acceptable, it concluded that "for most people, long-term care insurance is too risky and too expensive."

Forcing people to buy coverage might fix some problems. But the private insurance industry will still re-

quire regulation to ensure that insurers don't spurn individuals whose care is likely to be costly and that insurers finance a reasonable standard of care.

Even such regulation won't solve a fundamental problem. Commercial insurance protects people against risks, such as car accidents, that vary among individuals but average out across a large population. As Harvard economist David Cutler has explained, long-term health care is different: It is almost impossible to predict how costly the care will be in 2040. Insurers face equally serious uncertainties about how much they must put aside to pay future bills.

Insurers could hike premiums drastically when the true costs become known. Actually, they already have. Consider CNA, the industry's pioneering firm. It held rates steady for many years, then raised them by 50 percent in 2003. CNA had told policyholders, many on fixed incomes, that it would not raise their premiums based on health. Unfortunately for the consumers, CNA reserved the right to

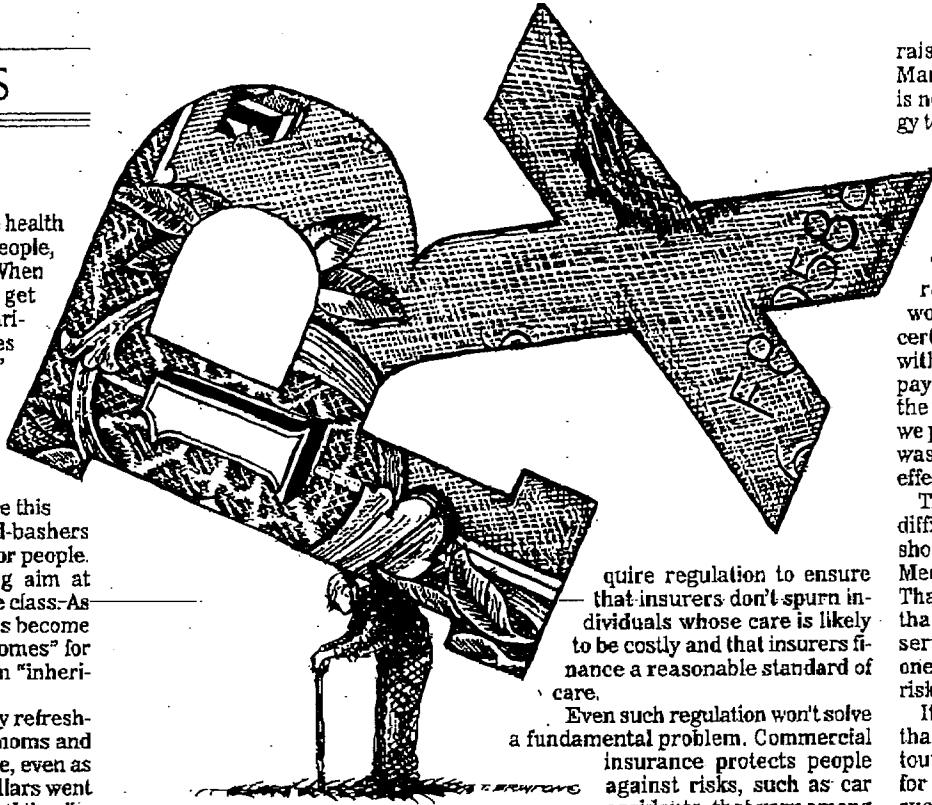
raise premiums across the board. Many competitors followed suit. This is not a sustainable or humane strategy to manage unexpected health costs.

Because the private market doesn't work well, efforts to reduce Medicaid spending by shifting the burden onto private markets won't work well, either. Tightening Medicaid rules might reduce public spending slightly. It won't eliminate underlying costs. It certainly won't distribute the burdens with greater dignity or fairness. Taxpayers will thus have to foot much of the bill for long-term care. Currently, we pay the bill through a program that wasn't designed to cover these costs effectively.

The alternative is as obvious as it is difficult: The federal government should pay for long-term care through Medicare, openly, for every American. That would stanch the fiscal bleeding that forces states to cut important services. It would also protect everyone from one of life's most frightening risks.

It's telling that an administration that rails against the "death tax" and touts private Social Security accounts for inheritance nest eggs would pursue the home equity of widows with Alzheimer's disease. Sure, some seniors go too far in sheltering their assets. The real problem is that Medicaid forces people to gain through the back door what government should - and only government can - provide through the front.

Jacob S. Hacker, a professor of political science at Yale University and a fellow at the New America Foundation, is completing a book on economic insecurity, "The Great Risk Shift." Harold Pollack teaches Social Service administration at the University of Chicago and is faculty chair of the Center for Health Administration Studies. This essay first appeared in the Los Angeles Times. News readers can contribute essays of general interest to Other Voices. Please call the editorial page editor at (734) 994-6764.



AZ News
8/28/05

Woman had sex with children -- live on Internet, police say

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

By Lisa Medendorp

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 31-year-old Ravenna woman is facing trial on charges that she used a Web cam to send pictures over the Internet of herself and three minor children performing sex acts.

Jennifer Kay Phillips, who remains in the Muskegon County Jail in lieu of \$200,000 bail, waived her preliminary examination last week in 60th District Court.

Phillips, of 3806 S. Ravenna, Apartment 2, was arrested this month after an investigation by the Muskegon County Sheriff's Department.

She is charged with three counts of child sexually abusive activity and one count of using a computer to commit a crime. The alleged offenses occurred in July.

Detective Shane Brown said the woman sent the images to a man she made contact with over the Internet. The investigation began after one of the children told a parent, and the parents contacted police, he said.

The male and female children involved ranged in age from 7 to 15, police reported.

The man on the other end of the Internet connection had provided fictitious information when registering his "screen name," Brown said. A "screen name" is a pseudonym that people use to conceal their identity when communicating on the Internet. Multiple search warrants were served to the Internet service provider, but the man's identity has not been discovered, he said.

When Phillips allegedly told the man one of the children had disclosed what was going on, "he deactivated the screen name and disappeared into the abyss of the Internet," Brown said. Phillips never received money for her alleged actions, he said.

Brown said the man "was telling her what to do, and she would perform sex acts with each of the children in front of the Web cam."

The woman and children were nude, he said, and several different scenarios occurred. She would allegedly do certain things to the children and they would do things to each other and to her.

Brown called it a "heart-breaking situation" for the families.

"It's typical of crimes against children. You victimize not only the kids themselves, but everyone in the family," he said.

Dropped charges not end of fight in child custody case

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- Micah and Ofelia Garcia wonder how their son, Joshua, nearly 5, has changed in the last year.

Does he still like to play basketball and ride his bike? Does he remember pulling his dad's eyelids up to see if he's asleep?

The Wyoming couple have not seen the boy since August 2004. The state took him away amid allegations of abuse involving another child the couple was caring for: a 6-year-old girl the Garcias were adopting suffered scalding injuries to her legs in their home.

The Garcias, who insist the girl was injured accidentally, hope to be reunited with their son and adopt the girl now that Kent County prosecutors dropped the charges against them -- second-degree child abuse, a four-year felony -- shortly before their trial was to begin this week in Circuit Court.

But the future is uncertain.

Prosecutors still are pursuing terminating the couple's parental rights to Joshua, with a 10-day trial planned for October.

The adoption of Alyssa, Ofelia Garcia's cousin for whom they had cared for eight months, also was put on hold.

Authorities say the Garcias failed to get immediate medical attention for the girl, and question their explanation that her injuries were accidental.

Assistant Prosecutor Chris Becker said he dropped criminal charges after recently reviewing jury instructions, which stated, based on a state Supreme Court ruling, that parents could not be convicted of the charge for failure to seek immediate medical attention -- the theory of the criminal case.

"It has nothing to do with the facts of the case -- it's the law," Becker said. "They're the only ones in the house. ... The girl was substantially injured."

In court records, authorities said the parents "have provided one explanation for Alyssa's injuries, which the doctors believe are not consistent with the injuries Alyssa sustained."

Attorney Michael Liquigli, representing Joshua Garcia, said termination proceedings will continue. He believed allegations the parents did not seek immediate care for the girl will be an issue.

But attorneys for the couple, Helen Nieuwenhuis and Damian Nunzio, said the parents have given consistent statements to authorities, which have been backed by the girl, now 7.

They said the Garcias are innocent, living an unthinkable horror.

"There are many good things about the Garcias, but what Helen and I learned in the last year is that they are really nice and good people who enjoyed a good life," Nunzio said.

Micah Garcia, 30, said he was giving the children baths Aug. 21, 2004, when the girl was injured. He said he bathed his son first. As the boy got out, he urinated in the tub. His father said

he ran hot water in the tub to disinfect it, leaving a "shallow" amount of water, and planned to return to clean it.

He went downstairs to put in a movie for his son, when he heard the girl scream, followed by screams of his 23-year-old wife. The couple said the girl had gone into the bathroom alone, stepped into the tub of hot water and slipped. They put the girl in a cold shower, and she seemed better, they said, adding they had no idea she had been injured seriously. She went to bed without trouble. The next morning, her pajamas were wet.

"That's when we noticed the blisters," the husband said. They said they immediately took her to Metropolitan Hospital, where she was treated for second- and third-degree burns. She underwent two skin grafts.

The couple said they never imagined they would lose the children.

"We thought (the authorities) were there to protect families and children, and they did the total opposite to us," the mother said, in tears.

They have no idea where either child is, or what they have been told. They hate to think about the children being apart -- they were like any other brother and sister.

"Our house is not a home without them," Micah Garcia said.

5-year-old girl found after Amber Alert

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Five-year-old Lamiya Brown-Balogh was reunited with her mother late Tuesday morning after police stopped a car in Holton Township occupied by a 17-year-old girl and her boyfriend. The child, who lives at 723 Louis, was the subject of an Amber Alert Tuesday after her mother discovered her missing about 3:45 a.m.

Muskegon police said they plan to meet with the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office today to discuss possible charges against Shelby Rae-Keith Smith, who had the child with her.

In the meantime, Smith has been lodged at the Muskegon County Jail for kidnapping.

"She told us she was baby-sitting the child," said Muskegon Detective Sgt. Monica Shirey. "That doesn't match some of the information we had obtained."

Smith and the child's mother were acquaintances who used to live in the same apartment building, Shirey said. The mother let Smith stay overnight at her home because Smith "was homeless and she was waiting for her male friend to get out of work."

Shirey said the mother last saw the child before going to bed about 3 a.m. The mother woke up about 3:45 a.m. to the sound of a car leaving the residence.

The red Pontiac Grand Am being sought by police Tuesday belonged to the male friend, who was not arrested.

Muskegon officers fanned out Tuesday morning seeking the child. Oceana County Sheriff's deputies also assisted by checking areas in Newfield Township because the male friend's family lived in the Hesperia area.

Just before 11:30 a.m., Muskegon Officer Clay Orrison spotted the red car near Brickyard and Marvin roads in Holton Township. Shirey said Smith and her friend had been driving from the Hesperia area to a friend's house in the Holton area.

Missing Michigan Girl Found Safe

Amber Alert Canceled

POSTED: 9:48 am EDT August 30, 2005

UPDATED: 2:46 pm EDT August 30, 2005

An Amber Alert issued for a 5-year-old Michigan girl has been canceled after the child was found safe Tuesday, according to Michigan State Police.

Lamiya Amber Balogh (pictured, right), of Muskegon, Mich., was last seen at about 3 a.m. Tuesday with Shelby Rae-Keith Smith, 17, according to Michigan State Police. Police said they considered this an "acquaintance kidnapping."

Police believed Smith was headed to Nuncia, Mich., with the girl in a red Pontiac Grand Am. No information was available as to where the girl was located and whether she was with Smith.

Copyright 2005 by ClickOnDetroit.com.

Michigan Report

August 30, 2005

SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES STUDENT SAFETY BILLS

More bills aimed at convicting registered sex offenders and keeping them away from children cleared a Senate committee Tuesday.

The Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously approved the bills, a few of many in the Legislature under the umbrella of the Student Safety Initiative.

HB 4957 would make it a felony with a maximum two-year sentence for registered sex offenders to take a job or volunteer position with a child services organization.

Registered offenders who conceal their status in order to get such a job could serve a four-year sentence under that legislation.

That bill is tied to SB 130, which would prohibit registered sex offenders from accepting or maintaining employment or volunteering with a childcare center, school, playground and youth league or youth organization.

Under HB 4937, testimony would be allowed as evidence that a defendant on trial for a sexual offense against a minor has committed certain prior offenses against minors.

People who fail to report to law enforcement under the Sex Offenders Registration Act could see jail time up to one year and \$2,000 in fines for the second offense and up to four years and \$2,500 for a second offense under HB 4934, the House version of SB 607.

Punishment for the first offense would be 93 days imprisonment or a \$1,000 fine under the legislation, which is the current, non-graduated, penalty for violating the act.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker (517) 373-7394

Northern Michigan Counties Announce New Approach to Foster Care ***"Family to Family" Keeps Foster Care Kids in their Schools and Communities***

August 31, 2005

TRAVERSE CITY – For years, Michigan foster children were often placed outside their own communities and moved multiple times while in care. There is substantial research indicating that children in foster care who have frequent contact with their birth parents, remain in their schools, and continue their existing friendship and family networks, have a higher rate of successful reunification with their birth parents.

"Children are our most precious resource," Governor Jennifer M. Granholm said. "It is critical that we work together to do everything we can not only to ensure the safety of our children, but also to provide them with a stable environment in which they are surrounded by adults who care about them and will help them learn and grow."

That is why the Michigan Department of Human Services is working to implement a child welfare reform initiative called Family to Family in every county in the state. The goal of Family to Family is to place children who must be removed from their families with one permanent and stable family in the child's own community until reunification with birth families can occur or until the child is released for adoption.

The Family to Family initiative has already been successfully implemented in several counties across the state, including several counties in northern Michigan. Those counties include: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Roscommon and Wexford. Six other northern Michigan counties will be implementing Family to Family in the near future. Those counties include: Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Iosco, Mackinac and Presque Isle.

Family to Family is a partnership between the local Department of Human Services and the community to reduce disruption in the lives of at-risk children. This approach ensures that birth parents, foster parents and community representatives are involved in the decision-making process concerning the placement and service needs of at-risk children.

In an effort to help northern Michigan residents better understand the Family to Family initiative, the Department of Human Services offices in northern Michigan counties have come together to host a community forum on August 31 at 11:00 a.m. at **Northwestern Michigan College Great Lakes Maritime Academy, 715 E. Front St., in Traverse City.**

-MORE-

This event will feature a foster parent and former foster children speaking about their experience with the child welfare system as well as a parent who is currently involved in the state's child welfare system. Additionally, representatives from northern Michigan community human service agencies will speak about the services they provide and how they work with DHS on the Family to Family initiative.

"When children are placed in foster care they often do not understand what has happened and why they cannot live with their parents," Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director, said. "When we ask children where they want to be, no matter how dysfunctional their family is, the children overwhelmingly say they want to live with their family. With the Family to Family approach we are able to keep kids in their own neighborhoods and communities by placing them with extended family or kin. The less disruption children encounter, the easier it will be for them to succeed in school and in life."

The Family to Family model protects children by:

- ☐ Increasing family involvement and investment in developing safety and service plans for their children.
- ☐ Utilizing extended family, kin and community-based resources to support the family and monitor the safety of the children.
- ☐ Providing better information to DHS staff to ensure that all safety issues are addressed and back-up plans are available.
- ☐ Keeping the children in the community, their school and with siblings who know what is "normal" for the child and will be alert to any changes that may signal problems.
- ☐ Greater use of individualized services to meet the unique needs of a particular family.

For more information about the Family to Family initiative, visit the Michigan Department of Human Services Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

###

Youth to serve time for killing uncle; family split

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

By Paul Janczewski pjanczewski@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6333

A judge said "an unspeakable family tragedy" unfolded in a matter of minutes that will affect family members "for years, and probably decades, to come."

Genesee Circuit Judge Joseph J. Farah was referring to events that occurred about midnight April 2 at 222 E. Stewart Ave., when Douglas B. Winters, 14, stabbed his uncle, Gregory E. Mitchell, 32, after an argument. Mitchell was the brother of Winters' mother, and his death left a wife without a husband and four children without a father.

Now, the family has fractured, Farah said.

"And there's nothing the court is able to do that fully addresses this multiple tragedy," he said.

Farah sent Winters to the Glen Mills School, a medium-security school for youth offenders in Concordville, Pa. He ordered Winters held there until he completes the program or until he reaches age 21.

"Douglas has to be held accountable," Farah said.

The teen's progress will be evaluated in February, Farah said.

Winters pleaded no contest to second-degree murder.

Witnesses at an earlier hearing said Winters plunged a knife blade into Mitchell's chest after the two argued. Police and prosecutors believe they were arguing about Winters carousing on the streets and getting into trouble.

"I loved my uncle," Winters said, but claimed the man was intoxicated when he attacked him.

"My heart dropped" when he heard his uncle had died, he said.

Radio ads suggest county help fund justice facilities from budget

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

A small group of Kalamazoo County residents is airing local radio ads in hopes of persuading county commissioners to use part of the county's current budget to pay for new justice facilities. The group, Concerned Citizens of Kalamazoo, ran ads on WKZO on Friday and Monday and plans to run ads today, according to officials at WKZO.

A member of the group, Jerome Kohel, a former county commissioner, said the 60-second ads are aimed at influencing a poll of county residents about how much they're willing to pay for new justice facilities. County officials commissioned the poll in the wake of the defeat of a jail-juvenile home millage on Aug. 2.

Voters rejected a 0.49-mill tax increase to expand the jail and build a new juvenile home. They also turned down a 1.5-mill tax increase to operate a larger jail and fund crime-prevention and inmate-rehabilitation programs.

After the loss, county officials hired Epic-MRA of Lansing to poll 400 voters from the last election to try to find out what new criminal-justice facilities residents might be willing to fund. Kohel said he would like to influence the poll results. He and four other area residents paid \$502 for the radio ads to further that goal. Kohel wouldn't identify the other four contributors.

The ads ask residents to urge county commissioners to pay for half of the cost of an expanded jail and new juvenile home from the current county budget.

"Hopefully, as for the residents, they will call their county commissioners and get some discussion on sharing the cost," Kohel said. "Every time they want to do something, it requires new money.

"What they have to do at some point is start setting priorities," Kohel said.

The former county commissioner said he believes the county needs to upgrade its aging juvenile home. Kohel is less convinced that the county jail needs improvements.

Kohel is treasurer of the Kalamazoo County Taxpayers Association and did consult with Raymond Wilson, another former county commissioner and a member of the taxpayers association's steering committee, before running the radio ads.

"He talked about the commercial to me before he ran it," said Wilson, who said he helped write part of the script.

Wilson said the Kalamazoo County Taxpayers Association is not officially part of the radio-ad effort but that the ads do incorporate some of the association's ideas.

He said some members of the association's steering committee were on vacation and couldn't weigh in on the radio ads. So Kohel moved forward with the ads.

Wilson said he likes the concept of the county paying half the cost of new or expanded justice facilities. He said county leaders' insistence on finding out what voters will support financially isn't the right approach.

Wilson would like to see the county prioritize its spending and do more to fund criminal-justice facilities from its current budget.

“We keep insisting in our campaign, What is the county willing to pay for?” Wilson said.

Deputy County Administrator Peter Battani said Tuesday that he was aware of Kohel's radio ads but that he wasn't too concerned about them.

He said the county's poll won't be completed until mid-September. Epic-MRA suggested waiting until after Labor Day, when fewer county residents are away on vacation and pollsters can get a more accurate sampling, Battani said.

County leaders initially talked about having the poll completed by the end of August. They were mindful of a Sept. 9 deadline to put any proposals on the November ballot.

Battani said it's really unlikely the county will come back to voters in November with another proposal to build a new juvenile home or expand the jail.

“You've got a couple of commissioners who want to, but that's about it,” Battani said.

Dan McGlinn, vice chairman of the county board, said the idea of a 50-50 split of funds coming from “them” and “us” simply doesn't make sense.

“People are paying everything right now,” McGlinn said. “It's their tax dollars. You pay half and we pay half is illogical. It doesn't make sense. All of county government is supported by the taxpayers. The question isn't so much that we pay half, it's what do you want to pay for?”

Volunteers make quick work of Habitat home

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

By Martin Visser
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND HAVEN -- As recently as a few weeks ago, Dave and Brandy Nelson's five children liked to play in the vacant lot behind their rented apartment on Washington Street.

Today, the Nelsons own the lot at 1040 Columbus St. and a new four bedroom house that sits on it.

The Tri-Cities Area Habitat for Humanity, with more than 200 volunteers, helped build the home in a eight days last week, beginning with a kickoff last Sunday and completing final trim work Monday morning.

The Nelsons themselves put in more than 500 hours of sweat equity.

"We love it. It's nothing short of a blessing. It's remarkable how many people I didn't even know came by and said, 'how can I help?' " said Brandy Nelson, who along with her family already was moved in Monday night.

The Nelsons had been living in a rented apartment behind the lot for the past three years and were signed up as an alternate Habitat family. Brandy Nelson said they were surprised when a representative from Habitat called six months ago and offered them the lot and the home. Two other families were ahead of them on Habitat's list but both passed because the location wasn't a good fit for them.

The Nelsons, however, said the lot is perfect, and they love their new home. Their children will continue to attend nearby Ferry Elementary, and they can still stop by the candy counter at Pfaff's Pharmacy in Washington Square just as they have been doing all summer.

"I grew up in the neighborhood, and I can't imagine raising my kids anywhere else," Brandy Nelson said.

Ten-year-old Raelynn Nelson said she loved it, too. She shares the house with her parents and four siblings: Patrick, 10, Alyssa, 5, Chloe, 3, and Ella, seven months.

"It's great, very, very great. I get my own room," she said.

Crew chief Steve Donselar, of Donselar Floor Covering, said the eight-day project was inspired by the TV show "Extreme Makeover."

"I thought if they could renovate a house in eight days, we could do it," Donselar said.

He and the volunteer crew began last week Monday with nothing but a foundation at the site, which had been poured the week before. The finished product is a white, two-story home with four bedrooms, two baths, a rec room, a wide front porch, full landscaping and new appliances. The kids even got to pick the colors for their bedrooms.

Carolyn Howes, executive director of Habitat, said the group used the Grand Haven Area Arts Council's commercial building on Columbus and Ferry as its headquarters for the project and got the city to partially close Columbus for the week so workers could move back and forth between the two buildings.

The Nelsons said they are very excited about their new home and hope to live there for 30 years, Dave Nelson said.

In addition to building the home with volunteer labor and having most of the materials donated free or at cost, Habitat helps with financing by providing an interest-free loan. The Nelsons, who have limited income potential because Dave has a disability, said the home will help their family greatly.

"We can actually afford to live here. They didn't build a house outside of our means. We can thrive here and start saving money," Brandy Nelson said.

Detroit Free Press

Columnists

LOCAL COMMENT: Who'll lobby for social services?

August 31, 2005

BY MARK STUTRUD

Whenever government faces an issue involving energy, the "oil lobby" is loud and clear about how it should be resolved.

When proposed laws involve education, the National Education Association makes its opinions known.

Transportation, telecommunication, banking, agriculture -- all have powerful voices speaking on their behalf.

Now both federal and state governments are developing budgets that will severely curtail services to some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society, and the debate is much too quiet.

Those who are least powerful have little voice in the public arena.

They are people like Catherine. She can't speak for herself because she has Alzheimer's disease. Otherwise, she would let the policymakers know that she lives on Social Security, that her family does not have the means to pay for her care, that she depends on Medicare and Medicaid. She would tell them that the workers at her nursing home earn so little they can barely keep their own families together.

They are people like Jason. He's only 2 years old, so he can't tell the politicians how his teenaged mother's drug habit was stronger than her maternal desire to care for her child. He can't tell them that he depends on the state to give him a safe and loving foster home or that he needs Medicaid to pay for his doctor visits. He doesn't know that his foster mother hasn't had a rate increase in several years or that she often spends her own money to make sure a growing boy has clothing and shoes.

People like Debby can't speak for themselves because they can't speak. Debby can't move without a wheelchair. She needs help to bathe, dress and eat. The caregivers in her group home know how she's feeling by her face and body language. But Debby doesn't realize that those caregivers often leave after just a few months because they earn less than a living wage.

These are not people with "special interests." What's special is their need for basic human services that most of us take for granted. They are the most vulnerable members of our communities. They cannot speak for themselves because they are too young, too ill or too

disabled. They are the ones who fall through the holes when the social safety net is torn.

Because they can't speak for themselves, they are easily ignored. When budget priorities have to be made, it's easy to cut programs for people we do not see, whose voices we cannot hear.

There are legislative proposals to save dollars by setting time limits for people receiving Medicaid, regardless of their physical or mental health, or their employability. How can we expect people with multiple disabilities or families earning less than \$8,000 a year to pay for health care on their own?

There are proposals that will freeze payments for the home- and community-based waivers that help frail seniors receive needed health care services in their homes instead of a nursing home. How does forcing people to leave their homes make us a healthier society?

There are proposals that will eliminate or freeze health care for a thousand Michigan teens who are "aging out" of foster care and forced to fend for themselves. This group is at very high risk of homelessness, unplanned pregnancy, substance abuse and imprisonment -- all of which cost more than up-front services to help them learn to be successful adults.

This is not the way an enlightened society should treat its most vulnerable citizens.

In some political circles there is a romantic notion that churches, private donors and foundations could, if they were so inclined, provide all the necessary financial support for a social safety net. This is a fallacy.

Generous donors do provide a small but powerful portion of the operating budget for Lutheran Social Services of Michigan and the other private nonprofit agencies that contract with state, federal and county governments. But while these contributions help enormously, the main responsibility for social service must lie with the government, working in partnership with nonprofit agencies.

I appeal to our legislators to listen to the stories of the thousands of Michigan residents who cannot speak for themselves.

Caring for our most vulnerable is not only a matter of charity, it is a matter of justice, and it should be one of our highest priorities.

Let's place Catherine, Jason and Debby at the top of the list when it comes to making budget decisions.

MARK STUTRUD is president of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. Write to him in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48226.